



19th century (Edo Period, 1615–1868)

Plain-weave cotton with cotton *sashiko* (darning stitches) and painted design

Backlength: 39 3/4 inches (101 cm)

JAPAN

FIREMAN'S COAT

Over one hundred years ago, a Japanese fireman wore this thick, quilted coat along with a hood, gloves, and pants while fighting fires. In this photograph, we see the *inside* of the coat, decorated with a painting of Momotarō, a legendary Japanese hero, stomping on a wicked *oni*, or ogre. When putting out dangerous fires, the fireman wore the coat with the image on the inside next to his body as a reminder to be as brave as Momotarō. To prevent catching fire, he soaked himself in water while dressed in full gear.

Momotarō was given his name (“the peach boy” in Japanese) by his mother, who discovered him inside a beautiful peach floating in the river. Poor and childless, she and her husband were thrilled by this miracle. Momotarō grew into a strong, good-looking, brave boy. When he was fifteen years old, he received permission from his parents to travel to the Island of Ogres to stop the monsters who lived there from killing and stealing. By sharing his mother’s delicious homemade dumplings, he made friends with a fierce dog, a monkey, and a pheasant along the way. At first, these creatures quarreled but Momotarō convinced them to help him fight the ogres instead. The pheasant flew at the ogres’ heads, pecking their eyes, the monkey clawed and scratched, and the dog snarled and snapped ferociously until the monsters surrendered. After they promised to return everything they had stolen and to live peacefully, Momotarō gave the ogres some dumplings, too.

LOOKING QUESTIONS

What shape is this coat? Where are its neck and sleeves?

How many people do you see? What are they doing?

Look for a tool that a Japanese fireman might use. What else reminds you of fires?

What is happening?
Make up your own story based on this image.

Read *Momotarō the Peach Boy*.
What scene is depicted here?

Does Momotarō look strong or weak? How can you tell?

Compare Momotarō’s and the ogre’s eyebrows.
What feelings do they express?

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